

Capital: Minsk
Population: 9.77 million (2005)
GDP(current US\$): 22.88 billion (2004)
Population below national poverty line 42% (2003)
GDP per capita (current US\$): \$3,032 (2005)
GDP per capita (purchasing power parity): \$6,900 (2005/2005 est.)
Religion: Eastern Orthodox 80%, (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim) 20%
Language Usage: Russian and Belarusian
President: Alexander Lukashenka
Prime Minister: Sergei Sidorsky (acting since 10 July 2003)
Ambassador to US: Mikhail Khvostov



National Interest: The U.S. has a vital national interest in a prosperous, free, and peaceful Europe which must include a stable, democratic, and market-oriented Belarus. Belarus has the potential to contribute to and benefit from regional economic development but it needs to implement democratic and market reforms. The Belarusian Government's current policies hinder progress and isolate Belarus from the international community. The US foreign policy priorities in Belarus are to help foster a political and economic environment which is more democratic and in harmony with the region, through its work to strengthen civil society, political process, and the independent media.

OVERVIEW OF USAID'S FOCUS IN BELARUS

FY 06: Total FSA – \$11.48 million, USAID Total - \$8.18 million

Support to Civil Society Organizations and Political Processes (FY06 \$5.9 million):

USAID's assistance promotes development of civil society and political parties so they can effectively participate in the democratization and economic reform process, participate in future elections on a level playing field, hold government accountable, and counteract the isolation imposed by the authorities on the Belarusian population.

Support to Independent Media (FY06 \$1.6 million)

USAID promotes the development of Belarusian independent media so that they can document and draw domestic attention to human rights abuses, thus placing additional pressure on GOB to improve the overall human rights situation. USAID's assistance seeks to improve the professional skills of non-state media owners and professionals, including publishers, accountants and journalists; strengthen the legal and financial status of independent media; and increase journalists' capacity to provide the public with objective, fact-based, and useful information. USAID works with independent print and electronic media, the latter including private regional TV and radio stations.

Support to Vulnerable Groups of Population (FY06 FSA \$0.6 million; FY05 DCOF \$0.6)

USAID works with other bilateral and international donors to encourage and assist the GOB to reduce the social, economic and criminal causes of trafficking-in-persons, as well as to ease the plight of victims. USAID also seeks to improve the level of healthcare and social protection for Belarusians through its HIV/AIDS program and efforts to improve community-based services for vulnerable groups, including in the Chernobyl area.

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